



## MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE

LESTER SPELL, JR., D.V.M.  
COMMISSIONER

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### **Press Release – For Immediate Release – November 21, 2003**

As grocery stores are stocking shelves for the Thanksgiving holidays, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) is once again serving as a watchdog for consumers. Without a doubt, turkeys and hams are items of high demand in the days prior to Thanksgiving. The enormous volume of holiday favorites supplied in stores may beg the question: Are customers paying a fair price? The solution: the Consumer Protection Division of MDAC increases inspections – while maintaining routine inspections – of turkeys and hams as they are placed on the shelves in grocery stores and meat markets statewide.

“With the large number of turkeys and hams at consumer outlets during these few days before Thanksgiving, we work overtime, so we can perform the number of inspections on turkeys and hams that will give us a comfortable feeling that customers are getting a safe product and a product with the right price tag,” Commissioner of Agriculture Lester Spell said. “Our concern, of course, is for the consumer. With the quantity of turkeys and hams that are being moved right now, it is our job to make sure the stores are weighing the products correctly and are selling sanitary products. For the most part, the presence of our inspectors in the stores deters mischievous activities. While errors in pricing are often honest mistakes, the bad apples that are out there are what we are protecting consumers against.”

John Tillson, Director of the Consumer Protection Division for MDAC, states that inspectors abide by the following major guidelines:

- During the holiday season, an effort is made to put more emphasis on inspecting proper labeling in order to help the consumer comparison shop (price per pound, etc.)
- Turkeys and hams are weighed for accuracy and fairness to the consumer.
- **Products that fail under the check weighing procedures are placed off sale until the products have been correctly weighed and relabeled by the store.**
- Inspect turkeys and hams for proper temperature and no cross contamination with other food products. Frozen products must be kept in a frozen state and fresh products must be maintained at 41 degrees F. or lower.
- Procedures followed for the check weighing of products for accuracy is the nationally recognized *National Institute of Standards and Technology Handbook 133, Checking the Net Contents of Packaged Goods*.

Tillson reports that in 2002, approximately 62.5% of turkeys and hams were found to be accurate in weight. Most of the weight errors are due to honest mistakes and are not to defraud the general public.